6: Vinci T-5 (1950) 1959 SQ18 Yanoama SQ18
Sanema

133 the forest lands, and their tops are so high and so difficult of access that this has helped to preserve a biological world completely distinct not only from that of the surrounding lowlands of the Caroni, Paragua, Caura, and Orinoco valleys but also from that common to all other valleys in the American [114] continent. A few decades ago, when the aeroplane first enabled us to study these regions and their geological peculiarities, some observers proceeded to formulate wild theories which aroused more legitimate emotions in the breasts of explorers and scientists.

The formation of sandstone and conglomerate which overlays the original basic rock of this region to a depth of 2,500 metres was eroded almost completely on the periphery of these uplands, leaving the great flat-topped mountains isolated. This geological phenomenon began in the Secondary Era, when the plant and animal life on our planet was appreciably different from what it is today. The process of erosion continued right down to the ancient granite crust, while on the uplands flora and fauna continued as hitherto, restricted now to their new isolation. Communication between the heights and the plain became impossible. The pressure at 2,500 metres is very different from what it is at four hundred, and creates peculiar physiological changes in the organisms that adapt themselves to it.

●13 It seemed possible that the flat tops of these mountains, which from the air
114 appeared to be covered with bush, would not only reveal unknown vegetable species but also animals which scientists believed to be extinct. Perhaps certain monsters from the Mesozoic age—the Saurians, it might be, the inspiration of so many fantasies—still lived and pastured in deep chasms scooped out by the waters of ages. Speculation wove many a scientific fantasy.

In reality, the monsters remained well and truly buried in their geological strata and no mountain could preserve forms of life surviving through a radical
137 change of atmospheric and geological conditions. What did come as a surprise, however, on these mountains—and the Sarisariñama itself proved the point—was an entirely individual flora: orchids, epiphytes, bromeliads and lianas of hitherto unknown types, which are likely to keep botanical students busy for a long time all over the world.

136 The usual fly-catchers, merry little birds I had already known closely on other high Guiana mountains, came to greet us. Never having seen animals bigger than themselves, these birds took us for strange trees with two big humid flowers distilling honey at the top: our [illegible]es. First one of them came